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AUTHOR Venturelli, Shalini S.
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ABSTRACT

An ethnographic study of a pre-school classroom explored an unconventional triangulated framework using literary theory, cultural and critical theory for communication inquiry into the narrative experiences of multicultural children. Field observations were conducted during 1991 in a pre-kindergarten class in a western United States university town; seven children of diverse nationalities were observed. The study experiments with a humanistic framework for interpreting narrative discourses on two levels: (1) narratives--written, oral, and gestural--of children from multi-cultural, non-U.S. backgrounds; and (2) written and oral narratives of the head teacher who represents organizational classroom activity, program philosophy, and values of the dominant culture. The ultimate purpose of such dialectical analysis of narrative and tale structures in the two sets of discourse is to reveal, by means of embedded ideologies, cultural codes, significant clusters, and symbolic meanings, the process of consent and struggle between the discourse systems. Further, by examining this process it should also be possible to portray the particular socio-cultural system of the classroom. (Thirty-eight references are attached.) (Author/PRA)

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Dialectical Communication of Cultural Narrative Codes in the Discourse of Multi-Cultural Children: An Exploratory Study

by

Shalini S. Venturelli
Doctoral Student
School of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Colorado, Boulder

Address:
2875 Kenyon Circle
Boulder, CO 80303
(303) 494-5207

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An Exploratory Study

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(143 words)

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The ultimate purpose of such a dialectical analysis of narrative and tale structures in the two sets of discourse is to reveal, by means of embedded ideologies, cultural codes, signification clusters, and symbolic meanings, the process of consent and struggle between the discourse systems. Further, by examining this process it should also be possible to portray the particular socio-cultural system of the classroom.

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This ethnographic study explores an unconventional interdisciplinary framework using literary theory, cultural and critical theory for communication inquiry into the narrative experiences of multi-cultural children. The dialectical analysis of narrative and tale structures in the discourse gathered is to reveal, by means of embedded ideologies, cultural codes, signification clusters, and symbolic meanings, the process of consent and struggle between discourse systems, as well as to portray the particular socio-cultural system of the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

This ethnographic study of a U.S. pre-school classroom explores an unconventional triangulated framework using literary, cultural and critical theories for communication inquiry into the narrative experiences of multi-cultural children.

The approach departs from the strategies and perspectives by which children have been traditionally studied within the fields of mass communication and psychology; strategies that share in common scientific assumptions that human experiences are predominantly governed by some lawful order.

Mass communication research on children, at least in the United States, has originated largely from effects concerns, i.e. questions that ask whether the mass media have measurable "effects" on children's lives: on their play (James & McCain, 1982), on family and sibling relations (Lull, 1982; Alexander, 1982), on violence (Bandura, 1971, 1963), among other dimensions of childhood experience.

Such studies have been heavily dependent on the paradigms and epistemology of developmental psychology; the foundational discipline for most scholarship on children in many fields including education, public policy, social psychology, and communication.

Meanwhile, rhetorical and narrative codes from which children construct systems of meaning, reality, and coherence, and with which they articulate and disarticulate with dominant social organizations that regulate their lives through powerful discourses or ideologies, are not the perspectives from which their lives have, in contemporary scholarship, gained explanatory power. This is owed, first, to positivist conceptual vocabularies in the social sciences that contain a rhetoric of attitudes and motives not conducive to an examination of culture, social conflict, and narrative production in children's lives; and, second, to the marginalization of children's experiences by disciplines in the humanities.

It is one of the arguments of this paper, therefore, that the field of communication is eminently suited to redressing this vacuum in the 'human sciences,' owing to its uniquely

strategic position as an interdisciplinary field employing a range of methods, approaches, paradigms, and epistemologies that can help decipher the imaginative universe of signification systems and conceptual structures in the interpretive world of children. A world which is communicated, i.e., constituted, and made meaningful by narrative and textual forms embedded in children's actions and words. By reading these 'texts' as we do the 'texts' of the adult world, particularly in relation to social structure and dominant social organization, we tamper with the zoological metaphor, transforming it into a textual metaphor, a literary manuscript. We do this, as Geertz (1973) has argued, to understand the meanings others--children in this case--have placed upon experience, which, in itself, stands as a definition of a cultural approach to the study of communication. The search for a theory of fictions that focuses attention on 'construction' or 'making' as compared with conventional theories of behavior and development that emphasize irreducible commonalties of the species, has already influenced new directions in communication studies. This paper attempts to carry the new humanistic cultural approach into the study of children and communication, particularly in the ways their expressive textual practices reflect social/cultural experiences.

It is not the intention of this paper to explore a framework for a culturalist approach to the study of children and communication entirely from within literary theory and anthropology, with their combined interest in how experience is cast up, interpreted and constructed into knowledge; for that would limit the conceptualization to terms that are largely aesthetic and ritualistic. An interpretive approach to communication should do more. It should attempt, for instance, to connect that level in which children engage in the processes of meaning construction, with other levels or systems of discourse and power, in a manner that describes and enlightens how the two levels collide, contend, and struggle with one another. Put more simply, the cultural approach to the study of children and communication should examine the following dynamic: children's fiction-making vs. narratives of the dominant social order.

By pulling in an analysis of how social/cultural systems articulate with sub-discourses--in this case, those of children--we can enhance our exploration of dynamic processes by which such systems are constructed, maintained, and transformed within particular settings, such as in communities, schools, or classrooms. By even further defining the sub-discourse of children to a distinctive 'community of discourse' (Wuthnow, 1989) whose cultural experiences are completely outside the prevailing culture of, say, the classroom, we can isolate ways in which assent is mobilized, cultural boundaries defined, meaning constructed, and ideological narratives struggled over, resisted, and institutionalized.

Children from minority groups such as from Asian, South American, or African families in which the parents are foreign-born, are ideal subjects for such an analysis. The boundaries of their cultural experiences are distinct from that of the American classroom with its U.S.-trained teachers, a curriculum derived from assumptions and contributions of developmental psychology, and a majority of American students who are already actively manipulating and struggling with the narrative codes of the dominant social/cultural system. Because of this distinctiveness--a clarity of cultural boundaries and symbolic vocabularies--the field of relations between the rhetorical, discursive world of children from multi-cultural backgrounds and that of the central social organization within the classroom, is an ideal site from which to explore new frameworks for a cultural approach to the study of children and communication. One of the questions one can ask is whether, and how, children are active participants in the creation and struggle over meaning that constitutes the social order of defined communities. Such a question motivates the central concerns of this paper and can be addressed only by first forging methodological and theoretical liaisons between, on the one hand, literary studies and aesthetics and, on the other, cultural and critical studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND FRAMEWORK

The main purpose of this study is to discover the social/cultural system for a specified U.S. pre-school classroom as described in both the narrative structures of

children from non-U.S. backgrounds and in the ideological tales and narratives of the dominant social organization. Because this ethnographic problematic must progress through interdisciplinary levels of conceptualization, the first challenge must be to seek a method by which to articulate the structure of observed and recorded narratives.

As Barthes (1985) writes, "Numberless are the world's narratives. First of all, in a prodigious variety of genres supported by articulated speech, oral or written; by image, fixed or moving; by gesture; and by an organized mixtures of all these substances. It is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, tragedy, comedy, epic, history, pantomime, painting, sculpture, cinema, comic books, news stories, televisual stories, conversations, and aesthetic objects. Narrative occurs in all periods, all places, all societies; it begins with the very history of mankind. . ." (p. 95).

Faced with the infinity of narratives in any ethnographic collection, the multiplicity of the points of view from which we can discuss them--historical, ethnological, sociological, aesthetic, etc.--the analyst is virtually in the same situation as Saussure (1959, first published, 1916): confronting the heterogeneous nature of language and attempting to perceive in the apparent anarchy of its messages a principle of classification and a focus for description.

Propp (1968) and Levi-Strauss (1963) have taught us to recognize the following dilemma in the study of narrative: either narrative is a simple chronicling of events, in which case we can discuss it only by relying on the teller's (the author's) art, talent, genius; referred to by contemporary structuralists as an Enlightenment `myth.' Or else it shares with other narratives a structure accessible to analysis, and that no one, culturally and philosophically speaking, can produce a narrative without referring to an implicit cultural and historical system of units, codes, signs, symbols, and combinatory rules.

The ethnographic imperative of this paper, its commitment to discover the social/cultural system of a particular pre-school classroom as described in the narratives of children of multi-cultural background, leads to an exploratory inquiry into conceptual

categories from: (1) narrative theory: morphology, linguistics and semiotics; (2) cultural anthropology and critical studies: the ritual model, dialectical model and the ideological model. The remainder of this section will seek to develop the relevance of these approaches to the central questions of this paper.

Morphology: a classification of functions

Discourses gathered in the normal course of ethnographic field observations can be evaluated instrumentally or rhetorically. The first approach regards language as an instrument to express ideas and realities that have material form independent of language. The second approach regards language as the symbolic structure through which reality is both invented and signified. Each of these approaches will lead the ethnographic study in different directions and to different conclusions. Since this paper has elected to follow the second, it is necessary to taxonomically organize the discourse gathered in order to identify operant historical and cultural codes.

Until the work of Propp (1968, first published 1928), the study of narratives had been pursued only genetically, i.e., in terms of origins, and not from systematic description. Extracting the rules and divisional classifications from within Russian folktales was Propp's contribution to literary theory. In Morphology of the Folktale (1968) Propp demonstrated how scholars can go farther than conventional indexes of themes, characters, and plots, to categories of transference in which different characters, objects, and animals can be ascribed identical sets of actions, therefore functions, that serve the culminating purpose of each tale. His unit of analysis is the indivisible narrative unit, otherwise known as 'motif,' a figurative schema that is "incapable of further decomposition" (p. 12), and is more primary than a 'theme.'

Propp's framework is undoubtedly formal, but his method of reducing diversity to uniform plot interaction codes that create a rhetoric within the stories is invaluable to our study of culture. It is a major contribution to the rhetorical analysis of literature, a way of examining cultural systems through the vocabulary of folktales, narrative and political

discourses and a means through which to compare folktales with religious and mythic narrative forms. To apply his theory, therefore, is to perceive the narrative as a pure system where there is never a 'wasted' unit of meaning.

Linguistics: a grammar of actions

Once these units of meaning are classified, it is necessary to find a concept to organize them as 'grammar,' a strategy for linking them with each other throughout the syntactical system of the narrative. Contemporary literary studies has several solutions to this necessity, but for the purposes of this paper, a concept developed by Todorov (1966) offers possibilities. It is an analysis on the level of 'actions' of the characters, establishing rules by which the narrative combines, varies, and transforms a certain number of basic predicates.

From its first appearance, structural analysis has shown the greatest reluctance to treat character as an essence, even to classify this quality (Todorov, 1966). Without going so far as to withdraw characters from his analysis, Propp (1968) reduced them to a simple typology, based not on psychology but on the unity of the actions the narrative imparted to them: such as Giver of a magical object, Helper, Villain, etc. The manner in which character is evaluated in contemporary structural and post-structural literary theory, can be viewed as a recovery of Aristotelian and Medieval rhetorical criticism in which the psychological 'subject' has no explanatory power and makes minor contribution to the 'system of characters.' Instead, the system of characters is regarded in its essential linguistic construction as a system of verbs, or actions that lead us to glimpse the fabrication of cultural and social meaning.

Semiology: the meaning system

Semiology is the logical extension of Propp's examination of the 'literary object,' whereby narrative texts are now reconceived as 'signifying practices;' their structures as 'structuration' (a dynamic process, not a fixed object); and their narrative functions as a 'game.' Semiology questions the symbolic and semantic system of our entire civilization,

penetrating and demystifying the dominant meaning system, and framing all knowledge as 'writing' (Barthes, 1985, p. 5). In this sense, applied to tale structures and narrative discourse, semiology can lay bare the rhetorical codes (signs, signifiers and signifieds) by which, on one level, the dominant ideology mobilizes social order and, on the other, sub-dominant narrative discourses articulate with and resist that order.

Barthes' approach is often seen as a recovery of a rhetorical tradition that flourished from the time of the ancient Greeks to the Middle Ages. It is an approach that was sanctioned by the Medieval Church and employed 'units of reading,' or the best possible space for observing meaning, extracted from a narrative text. Barthes' central concern, therefore, is a classical one. He argues explicitly that bourgeois culture, as it has gradually taken over intellectual life, has repressed the study of rhetoric as it has repressed all things that do not conform to definitions of positivist rationality; and medieval rhetorical criticism is such a 'thing.'

A positivist approach, then, would collect the discourse of teachers and children in a pre-school classroom and assume that diction and statements truthfully mirror social conditions. Language is privileged with literal authenticity. A semiological approach, on the other hand, does not see social practices and forms autonomous of language. Instead, it sees language as the expressive system constituted of signifying clusters that points to processes by which meaning, struggle and social order are mediated.

The ritual model

American social science has generally quarantined the discourse on culture to the parameters of anthropological study of the 'primitive' and the pre-modern, because culturalist perspectives are contradictory to the notion of individualism, the paramount reality of psychological life that forms the foundation of social science epistemology (Carey, 1988). Since the transmission, cybernetic view of communication expressed in behavioral and functional terms has an impoverished lexicon of cultural concepts, it becomes necessary to turn to literature--as has been done in the preceding discussion--and

to anthropology to acquire a vocabulary for examining cultural systems and processes in ethnographic fieldwork on children. The insight that reality is a function of symbolic construction (Burke, 1973) brings into our frame of reference an active world of childhood textual experiences which acknowledges their significance to the concrete world of social practices.

The work of Clifford Geertz (1973) is a major contribution to the task of compiling conceptual categories in the study of culture. Absorbing influences from phenomenology, semiotics, British philosophy, and Continental literary criticism, Geertz elaborates a theory of symbols and symbolic processes in relation to the social order that is powerfully cultural--as contrasted with social or political. Carey refers to this elaboration as one that "progressively becomes a theory of communication as well" (1988, p. 40).

Ethnographies of children that focus on their narratives and textual engagement can call on Geertz's concepts to diagnose meanings; not to seek laws or predict human behavior. In that sense, it is more empirical than behaviorism, descending deeper into the "thick description" of a child's linguistic world and correlating it with other surrounding linguistic systems.

The starting point for Geertz is Max Weber's characterization of man as "suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" (Geertz, 1973, p. 5), which does not represent an experimental search for laws as it does an interpretive search for meaning. This nudges a cultural approach to communication in the direction of attempts to grasp the imaginative universe in which acts are signs played by actors. Untangling conceptual structures, deciphering the interpretations people cast on their experience in the public world, turns, Geertz argues, human action into a 'text.' By then reading this text--which is a sequence of symbols--the communication scholar interprets humanity the way a literary critic interprets a work of literature.

Thus the metaphor of the text now stands for human action and our task, even in reference to children, is to construct a reading of this metaphor. Clearly, what Geertz has

done is to dissolve anthropology into literary studies, challenging communication research to uncover particular fictions of the world that each community has erected; a constructionist, fictionalist model of human thought that must be seized and systematized by researchers. But the ritual model, in part, follows the U.S. tradition of applying only the concept of maintenance, though this time through symbolic production and shared, communal consumption of symbolic forms.

If this study were confined only to the preceding approaches, it would have to force a consensual relation between the narrative discourse of children from multi-cultural backgrounds and the social organization that contains them. Effectively, this neutralizes the power of the children's narratives, granting recognition only as they confirm the dominant order. While this study holds theories and models discussed so far to be rich in textual methodology, they do remain undemocratic in implication without a framework that accounts for the active articulation and disarticulation among multiple narrative levels that define the social and cultural system of a particular setting, such as a classroom. For enhancement of the exploratory framework we must turn to a dialectical model and and an ideological model.

Dynamic model

The problem of connecting literary analysis to social organization in the study of culture is addressed, at least partially, in the 'structure of feeling' model developed by Williams (1975, first published 1961). Finding conventional ideas of culture--such as the ideal, the documentary, the social--too fragmentary and static, Williams pushes for recognition of processes that reveal the entire culture system: "I would define the theory of culture as the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life. The analysis of culture is the attempt to discover the nature of the organization which is the complex of these relationships." (1975, p. 46).

The stress is on the word 'relationships' and 'whole process,' concepts that distinguish his work from conventional theories on the study of culture which rarely

examine relations between expressive products dynamically or in terms of mutual interaction, in order to reveal a totality--a whole organization. This approach is essentially an argument for a cultural critique of the entire social system, not just segments within it; unlike both anthropology and literary theory which do not hold to syncretic ambitions.

But from which site or location can one glimpse processes of the 'entire social system'? Williams privileges literature, narrative texts, art and ideas, which are the cultural products of a social system, as the strategic option. He goes further and asserts that not only is the social system accessible through textual analysis, but you cannot comprehend a society except by means of its discursive practices. The reason for this conviction is obvious: without literature and narrative--or other forms of art--the study of society will dissolve into an accumulation of particular histories or particular cultural practices, as conventional ethnographic/anthropological methods demonstrate. Since society is more than the sum of its particular ethnographic histories, that 'something more' can be found in the concept of relations between them. These relations, Williams writes, are best captured in the patterns, textures, meanings, and structures of the narrative text, of communicated discourses.

The insistence on seeing the cultural process 'as a whole' requires that the textual analysis of cultural expression be conducted in relation to an analysis of the social organization that influences them. As this corresponds to the direction sought in this study, namely, the analysis of the structural relations between a particular set of narrative discourses within the classroom, Williams approach holds promise.

In the 'structure of feeling,' this study has found a sophisticated justification for its approach: Williams (1) conceives textual analysis as central to the study of culture, privileging narrative discourse as the eminent analytical field for accessing the social/cultural system; (2) establishes a necessary relationship between expressive culture and systems of power; (3) powerfully relates literary theory to social theory; (4) assimilates

ethnography to social organization; and (5) preserves the humanistic interpretive approach to the study of culture.

But Williams' model, while grounded in a literary approach, lacks a method of textual analysis for uncovering how symbolic constructions are put together and how they can be made to yield up their significations, structures, and meanings. Without such a method, there is little hope for discovering how the social system is imaginatively conceived within human social experience. However, Williams' failure need only be our own if his theory of culture were the sole framework for this paper. It is for a very good reason that the strengths of French and Russian structural-rhetorical literary theory--with its absence of social analysis--is being triangulated with the anthropological emphasis in U.S. cultural studies and the social organizational emphasis in British cultural studies. This allows conceptual and methodological compensations as well as an exchange of strengths to be conducted among the paradigms during the analysis of field data that is to follow.

Ideological model

The foregoing literature review has thus far identified narrative analysis as an important and necessary approach to the study of culture and of the social organization. But it has not provided conceptual categories for comprehending how systems of discourse are connected to the dominant social order and how the social order is, in fact, held together. For the missing links in our understanding we must turn to Stuart Hall's work on ideology (1980; 1982).

Hall argues that both structuralist literary theories and contemporary cultural studies have made cultural expressive practices unrealistically autonomous within the social system. In part, this is caused by structuralism's attention to classifications and grammatologies that distracts from the content of cultural experiences to their forms of arrangement. Hall's solution to this problem, without rejecting the value of structuralist literary theory and U.S. and British cultural studies, is through the concept of 'hegemony': that process whereby dominant social groups are able to unify and reconstruct the diverse

social formations within the system and mobilize consent of individuals and groups to the production of the sanctioned social organization. This is accomplished, Hall writes, through control and distortion of dominant ideological narratives, through deliberate fragmentation of communities of discourse that struggle to define themselves within the system, and through imposition of 'false unities,' such as the 'interest of the students,' the 'classroom interests,' or 'parental interests.'

Hall's theory is the missing element in this paper's search for an interdisciplinary framework. It allows the restitution of a significant element to the theoretical project of cultural studies and to the aims of this study, which are to portray the narrative and discursive relationship between the discourse of children from multi-cultural backgrounds and that of the teachers and the curriculum in one particular pre-school classroom.

This concept of 'hegemony' explains how narrative texts resistant to the dominant discourse are socially 'contained' by the selective organization of the cultural worldview of, say, the classroom; automatically limiting and influencing the range of thought and expression. It is, in effect, a theory of consensus creation that works through narratives of ideology.

Summary of interdisciplinary framework

The preceding examination of conceptual categories from theories in literary and cultural/critical studies guides the analysis of ethnographic data in this study to recognize: First, that narrative structures are an integral part of human communication systems and are significant not only for what they reveal about the adult world, but also for universes of textual meaning that children both produce and struggle with. Second, that all narratives refer to an implicit cultural and historical system of units, codes, signs, symbols, and combinatory rules. Third, that as textual records of what children have said (written, oral, and gestural), narratives must first be classified according to some principle in order to focus the interpretation. The process of classification is aided by the metaphor of grammatology in which the narrative discourse is fragmented into rhetorical 'units of

reading' and subjected to a dissection of myths, a logic of actions, syntax of characters, motifs, tenses, modes, and so on. Fourth, that once a grammar of tales particular to a discourse collection has been complied, it is possible to examine the social dynamic between narrative communities and, from it, the structures of the social/cultural system itself. Fifth, that human action, too, can be read as a 'text' and can be deciphered on the basis of sequential symbols. Sixth, that since every human community, child or adult, has its own fictions of the world which defines its experience, it is possible, even preferable, to use literary methods to understand social systems. Finally, that dominant social groups and elites influence the social order by means of the 'selective tradition': a power to reject subordinate forms of narrative discourse from the common culture, thus shaping the shared system of knowledge, cultural forms, and social practices. Through the explanatory concept of `hegemony,' it is possible to evaluate both how textual forms can be controlled, distorted, and fragmented by dominant ideological discourses, and how subordinate communities of discourse struggle against the dominant ideology.

FOCUS

Using data gathered during ethnographic fieldwork, this study applies the preceding exploratory framework for interpreting narrative discourses in a pre-school classroom on two levels: first, narratives--written, oral, and gestural--of children from multi-cultural, non-U.S. backgrounds; second, written and oral narratives of the head teacher who represents the organizational authority of the classroom, the philosophy of the program, and the values of the dominant culture.

The ultimate aim of a dialectical analysis of narrative and tale structures in the two sets of discourse would be to reveal, by means of embedded ideologies, cultural codes, signification clusters, and symbolic meanings, the process of consent and struggle between the discourse systems. Further, by examining this process it should also be possible to portray the particular socio-cultural system of the classroom.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Following from the literature and theoretical concepts enumerated earlier, this study questions whether a sequence of actions, i.e. tales, can be defined in the textual discourse gathered in the field; whether a grammatology of tales based on isolating formal units can be developed; whether the discourse of children from multi-cultural backgrounds articulates or disarticulates with that of the head teacher through tale structure; whether the social/cultural system of the classroom emerges from modes of opposition and consensus evident within and between each narrative level; and whether we can successfully evaluate the contribution of literary theory to the work of cultural ethnography, especially as it relates to communication research on children.

METHODOLOGY

The physical setting

Field observations in this study were conducted in the Fall of 1991 at a day-care center in a Western U.S. university town ranked among the top 28 national media markets. It should be noted that visits to the pre-school included first-hand observations of children in the classroom as well as two in-depth interviews with the head teacher.

The classroom studied is for pre-school 'seniors,' i.e. for four- and five-year-olds, many of whom are on their way to kindergarten at the end of the school year. Approximately thirty children are enrolled in this room at any given time, and during the course of the study, about one-third of their number were children from multi-cultural backgrounds. 'Multi-cultural' is defined here as racial, historical, cultural and national affiliations that are either non-white, non-Anglo-Saxon, or non-U.S..

This classroom for pre-kindergartners is run by one head teacher and several school staff. It is a large, rectangular room with space organized into activity zones for children to allocate their time by preference. Choices include a writing center, a painting corner, a block corner, a craft table, and an open floor space for the daily "circle time" when teachers

and children sit in a circle to read aloud, sing songs, discuss and allocate activities for the morning, and so on.

The subjects

Seven children of multi-cultural background were observed during morning periods, and they are referred to in this paper by their national or cultural origins. These origins are as follows: two children from Taiwan, one from Korea, one from Argentina, one from Saudi Arabia, one from Brazil, and one from Kuwait. Clearly, these backgrounds attest to predominantly non-Western, non-European cultures based in two continents: Asia (ranging from the Middle East to the Far East) and South America.

The head teacher of this pre-school classroom is young--in her mid-twenties--articulate and with a good grasp of the vocabulary of child development and current orthodoxies of educational philosophy, In conversation with adults she is informative and seems knowledgeable, competent and remarkably suited to her role. In conversation with children she is calm, unemotional, attentive, and low-key. She was seldom observed displaying physical affection to a child, or, for that matter, observed becoming angered, frustrated, or annoyed with a child; by all accounts, therefore, a "professional" pre-school teacher.

The head teacher has primary responsibilities for the classroom, including curriculum and activity design, management of support staff, liaison with parents and with outside visitors, and evaluation and analysis of individual child progress. She is intimately familiar with each child's background: months and years enrolled; family social, economic, and cultural situation; language development level; media tastes; toy preferences; sibling and social relations. This intimacy provides her with a vast store of detail that informs and punctuates her narrative explanations during interviews and conversation.

The social environment

The term 'social environment' is used here in this section to provide a sense of the ostensible, observable social dynamics and not, as yet, their real systems of meaning and organization. Social relations can be observed on three levels in this pre-school classroom:

(1) Despite the high ratio of 'multi-cultural children' to American children, a full two-thirds are still white, Anglo-Saxon. The American group exhibits some interesting sequences and clusters of actions that project a struggle to (a) comprehend the prescribed view of 'otherness' handed down and daily reiterated by the teachers; (b) relate in a concrete way to children who neither speak, act, nor look like themselves.

(2) From the perspective of teachers, as expressed in their dialogue and activities with the children, this cleavage in the social expression of the American group is no cause for anxiety. On the contrary, the teachers, especially the head teacher, express anxiety over the opposite outcome: intolerance or racial/cultural prejudice. As long as this outcome is held in check by the narratives, the 'fiction' (in the sense of 'making' or 'construction') of sameness and acceptance, teachers seem willing to settle for apathetic, spiritless social contact between the two classes of children; a contact in which their social beings tangentially meet, but without confrontation, struggle, or resolution.

For example, American children questioned about colleagues seated next to them at the writing center who are from a non-U.S. background, will either shrug their shoulders, ignore the question, distract the observer with a counter question, or even reply: "He (or she) doesn't know anything, don't you know?"-- effectively neutralizing the social being of the 'other.'

(3) The third level of structure in the social environment is the set of interpretations and actions of the 'multi-cultural' children. Since their cultural meanings and struggles with the dominant order in the classroom are the focus of the study, this particular segment of the portrait will be reserved for later discussion.

<u>Role of the researcher: impact and introspection</u>

As ethnographic genre, the data for this study will be dealt with in its original, qualitative form, inspired by some of the classic studies in social research: Weber's (1946; 1951; 1952; 1958a; 1958b; 1964) immersion in the histories and sacred texts of the world's religions led to identification of important patterns in the relationship between religion and secular society around the world; Durkheim's (1948) examination of ethnographic reports on Australian aborigines filed by anthropologists who had conducted firsthand observations culminated in a seminal qualitative work on elementary forms of religious experience; finally, Mead (1934) employed interpretive social analysis, without numerical calculations, to discern the role of social forces in developing the individual's mind and sense of self, resulting ultimately in the new paradigm of symbolic interactionism.

Sometime during the course of the second visit, the researcher moved from 'complete observer' status to that of 'observer as participant,' in an attempt to cultivate trust and friendship with the specific children identified as 'multi-cultural.' The cultivation of human contact was necessary to the central purpose of the study, for without this role shifting it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to collect the children's oral and gestural narratives. The stimulation of the narratives was, in many instances, the result of shared reading, writing, and conversational experiences between the researcher and individuals in the child group. Involvement was focused on sharing of literature, both oral and in books; sharing of writing, drawing, coloring, and dictating stories; conversations on craft projects, block construction, and imaginative--but seldom rowdy--games that engaged individual children.

The role of the researcher in reference to the head teacher, was that of interviewer, student researcher, and room helper. She was forthcoming with her views of the 'multi-cultural children,' their families, their position in the class, the program goals, and her personal challenges. This willingness to be informative was particularly stimulated by the researcher's attentive note-taking and can be attributed, in part, to a desire to actively influence the shape and nature of research conclusions. In other words, the head teacher

gave evidence, in her detailed narrative accounts, of her desire to serve as interpreter of the field data. She provided definitive causal explanations for each phenomenon encountered by the researcher, usually embedded in a discourse that was distinctively tale-like in structure; explanations that were rhetorically and semantically framed to exclude contradictory interpretations.

The data: texts and units of analysis

Documents for this study were engendered by the subjects either orally, gesturally, or in writing, during the course of observation and interaction with the researcher. The discourse of subjects is treated as 'texts,' consisting of the following:

(1) Through conversion to narrative text, syntaxes of gestures and actions observed in the multi-cultural group are grammatologically and semiologically decoded for cultural and social meaning.

(2) Expressive physical forms the children created, such as drawings, scribbles, dictated stories based on curricular themes (for example, `birds'), playdough shapes, and toy constructions--are all first analyzed for narrative, textual patterns and then rhetorically deconstructed in a way that is somewhat similar to Scott's work on the rhetoric of music in advertising (1990) and to Barthes' work with everyday cultural objects (1972).

(3) Oral discourses from interviews and conversations with the 'multi-cultural children' and with the head teacher, and from dialogues overheard among the 'multi-cultural children' and between them and American children in the class--form a central part of the data from which narrative structures are discerned, symbolically decoded, and interpreted for elements that describe the social/cultural system of the classroom environment.

The unit of analysis in all three divisions of data is consistent: a "unit of reading" (Barthes, 1985), the smallest rhetorical space for observing meaning, that can be comprised of a motif, a sequence of verbs or actions, a group of nouns or symbolic references, the functions of characters described in words or by dramatic action, and so on. These units

share in common an enclosure within narrative structures similar to tales and fables whose function it is to describe, explain, and struggle with, cultural experience.

Sampling and analysis procedure

The entire collection of fieldnotes was organized into discursive segments and attributed to specific children or the head teacher who generated them, resulting in a collection of discourses classified by individuals. These discourses, whether verbal or gestural, were then probed for unified narrative structures. Once identified, the narratives were then submitted to the literary/social/anthropological analysis guided by the interdisciplinary framework outlined earlier.

Theory vs. field experience

It is important to stress, prior to reviewing the findings, that the researcher's observations during the course of fieldwork were neither governed by any theoretical frameworks and triangulated conceptual designs, nor any disciplinary perspectives. All through the field experience, the researcher did no more than to narrow the scope of observations to the group of seven children sharing one common characteristic, their non-U.S. family backgrounds; and to the children's cultural expressions, viz. their words, actions, and productions.

The beginnings of a theoretical position began to take shape following the analysis of an interview transcript conducted with the head teacher. The transcript revealed patterned narrative and tale structures which were analyzed structurally and rhetorically. When a retrospective examination of fieldnotes and fieldjournals revealed the beginnings of a collected discourse gathered from the children as well, possibilities for an interdisciplinary approach began to suggest itself. This paper is an attempt to test this approach.

The important point is that the data are patently inductive. They developed from within the context of unfolding events, circumstances, interactions, and relations with the children and not from some pre-determined theoretical disposition. The marriage of literary

theory to social theory and cultural studies is essentially in the nature of a humanistic exploration into communication studies on children

FINDINGS

The use of narrative criticism in the study of children has confined itself to normative message analyses of the dominant narratives that children are fed through commercial literature and other media (Sillars, 1991), in order to determine whether stories are being appropriately told, whether they are "true" to reality, and what cultural influences are molding and shaping the experience of childhood. This approach is consistent with the "effects" tradition in U.S. communication studies.

Neglected in the process has been a regard for and attention to the narratives that children themselves spawn, as active and free agents, bounded by a cultural social system that must interact continuously with their discourses in order to assimilate them to a set of practices and institutions. The following analysis is an attempt to privilege the 'textual' communication of children who are not yet firmly mobilized to the dominant social system, and to catch a fleeting glimpse of the way in which that discourse, through narrative, actively engages the dominant system in polemics of resistance and acquiescence. In effect, this approach humanizes the study of children by empowering them with creative force in the construction of reality and culture. Using Patton's (1990) terms, though he may not have consciously intended for them to apply to ethnographies of children, the framework for this paper uses "indigenous concepts" (p. 391); that is to say, terms arising from the speech of the subjects themselves.

The inductive approach is primary to the indigenous typology that follows, in which an attempt is made to divide the world into units of conceptualization that are the storytellers' definitions of events. Following Patton's guidelines (1990), "imposed classifications" will be avoided whenever possible in deconstructing the complexities of reality. However, the analyst's typologies will be brought in to evaluate textual structures

by means of the interdisciplinary framework described earlier, in those areas where it is important to reveal processes in the cultural and social dynamics.

From this framework, and based on the works of Barthes (1985) Levi-Strauss (1963), and Kristeva (1986), three operations of the semiological method are highlighted: (1) Texts are segmented into narrative signifiers, i.e. into citational (referential) links to the social/cultural environment. (2) Inventory of meanings in each textual unit or fragment are correlated to semic codes such as the cultural narrative code (regulates beginnings, middles and endings), the topographic code (cultural significance of `place'), the symbolic field (of characters and objects organized by historical symbolism), the onomastic code (cultural code regulating the naming of things), the rhetorical code (providing the grammar of rhetorical schemes), and so on. (3) A second level of correlation, this time to other narrative signifiers within the same text or to the texts of other children, even that of the head teacher. At this level, the collection, the group of texts which had been first separated, is now mingled, even braided; consistent with the etymology of the word 'text,' which is 'fabric,' a braid of correlates.

All the discourse analyzed in the study is not included here; only those representational examples that demonstrate the deconstructive process of the exploratory framework.

Analysis

Tales of the 'multi-cultural children'

The Taiwanese boy

This child was observed to disarticulate with the social organization's actional code that regulated action sequences, on several occasions. By remaining on the floor after circle time, long after the children are dismissed to choose an activity, the boy from Taiwan actively ignores the activity structure in the cultural code, or the space/time structure in the topographic code. The researcher walked over and extended a hand. "What would you like to do?" The boy squirmed uncomfortably on the floor. "Would you like to paint bugs?,"

the researcher asked again. He shook his head, but at the suggestion of the writing center he silently slipped his hand into the researcher's. He continued a passive spectator at the writing center, watching the other children color, draw and chat. The researcher handed a box of crayons him and after a thoughtful pause, he began drawing. "Those are nice circles," the researcher observed. The boy smiled for the first time. His eyes were bright and his facial expression intense. He pointed to his work and verbalized rapidly in Chinese.

The analyst's interpretation leans more in favor of the child's active choice, rather than a cultural default based on ignorance of the system, because he is observed in other situations exercising the 'selective tradition' on inclusion of cultural meanings. By refusing the choice of painting insects (the structured theme of the day), he projected a counter-discourse to symbolic practices that seek to organize and regulate his time; a language of dissent that elects not to adopt a cultural code of enthusiasm for curricular themes.

On the other hand, his silent assent (slipping his hand into that of the researcher's) to the suggestion of the writing center, expresses accession to a cultural practice that has meaning and with which he can articulate. The act of verbalizing (in Chinese) while drawing, the intensity and concentration of the engagement, expressed volumes about the nature of the experience. The child actively inscribed meaning into the activity (it was not imposed on him) and for the first time, in the researcher's observation of him, he considered it appropriate to express the meaningfulness of the experience by enunciating; a phatic (speech) code that is central to cultural being. In the context of writing/drawing, this is significant.

On another occasion, when the child consented to making a 'bird book' (another structured activity), it was only as a signal to engage in the process and not to adopt the content of the expected structure: which is to provide the opportunity for children to 'express themselves' in conscious literary style on the theme of birds. Thus, while the boy agreed to sit down with paper and crayon like the others, he inscribed a different set of

meanings to the dominant action code. This code, in the American context, invites children to be 'creative,' to express themselves; in other words, to develop affinities for the culture of individuality--a powerful American cultural, social, even political code that has a deterministic relation to the social system.

Since the signifier--"creative self-expression"--may not find a meaningful place within the Taiwanese child's ascensional symbolism (how he stratifies symbols), he converts the action to a different set of meanings: reproduction. Instead of 'writing a story' (by dictation to an adult), he studies the facial expressions of the researcher as though they were a text, a page on which meaning is written, and interprets the page as cue to literally duplicate or replicate on paper the researcher's written words and drawings with meticulous care.

He rejects the cultural code of self-conscious 'fiction making' and invents his own fiction of the action as 'imitation.' Obviously, this exchange of codes in which a dominant one that enculturates to individuality is replaced by a subordinate one that enculturates to mimesis has a subversive implication for the social organization in which he is placed. The boy is comfortable with mimetic replication of words handed to him--without understanding the words of the linguistic system from which they derive--but not with creativity. The former is culturally and historically accessible; the latter is not.

This contrasts with the interpretations of an American child--John (pseudonym)--who is seated next to him. John interprets the activity as an injunction to creativity and dictates a conventional narrative structure about a wolf and birds with all the standard elements of tension, drama, and resolution. The irony is that the results, the final outcome, is really not that different from his Taiwanese peer. This is because John describes his themes as mimetic of television narratives that have provided him a collection of functional narrative codes from which he can construct replicated, referential tales of his own. In a sense, then, both children, from different cultural, national, and historical backgrounds,

engage in the act of formal expression through structures of reproduction and mimesis; not the socially sanctioned abstract concept of 'creativity.'

The Korean girl

As in the preceding example, this subject expresses non-verbal, i.e. gestural, dissent to structured social forms within the particular system of this classroom, until offered the choice to 'read a book;' an activity that finds meaning within the symbolic field of objects and actions that she draws from. The child is unresponsive to the researcher's greeting or to a question about the green paint on her hand. She bows her head and clutches tightly to her chest a coloring book. The researcher suggests a game, the writing center, and other activities. To all of these the girl uncomfortably twists her body and averts her eyes. "Let's go find a good story book to read," the researcher suggests as a final offer. This choice immediately elicits a smile and direct eye contact with the researcher. The child walks up to the bookshelf in the reading corner and makes an active selection: she picks out the "Bunny Book"

That her choice of titles was too hasty becomes rapidly apparent because the story, the characters, the symbolic action, the images, leave her completely unresponsive. It is important to note here that her apathy to this particular book continued despite her evident knowledge and grasp of English, and despite the researcher's attempt at varying the level of dramatic telling from soft and low-key, to forceful and melodramatic. Again, the narrative codes of plot sequences and the cultural codes of meaning structures in the "Bunny Book" were unfamiliar, therefore impregnable, to the Korean girl. Even with language proficiency in English, she is unable to assign meaning and symbolic significance to the book's tale structure, theme, and semantic constructs; a sort of 'gap' in metaphoric systems prevented any real communication from taking place.

To experiment with this concept of a 'metaphoric gap,' the researcher abandoned the written narrative in the book and began describing, as vividly as possible, the illustrations, pointing to hidden details and describing their forms and colors. The

interactive dynamics altered drastically. the child smiled broadly, leaned over the illustrations, looked with animation into the researcher's eyes and giggled and laughed, touching the pictures and naming them, especially the flowers. This 'reading' constructed with small component parts that are visual, rather than textual, revealed the child's narrative system of aesthetic complexity as opposed to actional complexity. In other words, her construction of reality is based on an organization of aesthetic signifiers responsive to form and color, rather than to plot, character, and theme. By reconstituting the narrative from one based on chronological, conventional narrative, actional, and onomastic codes to one based on illustrations of flowers exposed a semic system (a system of signifieds and signifiers) culturally at variance with social order of the classroom. Without a common vocabulary of narrative and cultural codes, knowledge of the English language alone will not aid in assimilating a child to the dominant narratives of the social system which are themselves constructed from this set of common codes. The codes form a cultural 'grammar' that must be appropriately ordered to be understood. The Korean girl, on the other hand, had an aesthetic narrative system oblivious to this 'grammar,' making it that much harder for her to submit to the central social organization of the classroom.

The Saudi Arabian boy

The discursive interaction between levels in the hierarchy is even more complex with this subject who willingly consents to most curricular activities, but without translating them into socially condoned realities, as in his consent to make a horse with playdough. This boy is willing to ostensibly try out activities sanctioned by the dominant discourse but not within the collective, normative structure. For instance, he declined to contribute his horse to the communal construction of animal shapes led by an adult and all other children at the playdough table. The act of withholding disarticulated with the social expectation, but allowed his to preserve the object (the horse is a vital signifier in the symbolic field of animal forms in Arab culture) imbued by him with cultural meaning; thus preserving, as well, his own cultural identity from the milieu.

This child's narrative expression unfolds as he approaches the suggestion of making a bird book with a social smile and emotional detachment. He submits to adult direction, but with cultural uninvolvement; he acquiesces to the social expectation but visibly differentiates social consent from cultural and spiritual consent. Here is a narrative comprised of a sophisticated political text in which cultural symbols are manipulated by the child in the interest of political cooperation but without cultural submission. Bemusement with the activity of self-conscious narrative construction in the `bird book' assignment, along with yielding without cultural affirmation to suggestions of drawing in these 'bird books,' creates a complex rhetorical scheme whose discursive code is anagogic: i.e., it possesses features which reveal hidden, secret textual meanings.

In this case, those meanings are subtly but clearly resistant and oppositional to the dominant social discourse. How a young, five-year-old child is able to construct such a complex, sophisticated, and subtle rhetorical scheme for creating his own resistant reality is something that deserves to be explored through cultural anthropology and cultural history. The researcher suggests that under Arabic cultural codes prescribing concepts of childhood, the category 'boys' has very limited social function because it semantically divides five-year-olds from 'men.' But 'young men' places the child within the structure of a semantic scale, a continuum that leads to 'men.' This may account, at least partially, for this child's bemused tolerance of structured activities that enculturate children to the dominant symbols: he may interpret these activities as puerile, childish.

His reserve during the group music sing-along, even though he silently mouthed the lyrics, contrasted with his Taiwanese peer's enthusiastic imitation of verbal and musical sounds without English language proficiency. The Saudi Arabian boy understands English well, but chose in this scenario not to express identity with the cultural practice: again, consistent with his political mediation of contradictory discourse levels. Though knowledgeable of the dominant language, the dominant reality and its supportive social organization, he culturally resists assimilation by means of a rhetoric of unobtrusive

cordiality and narrative secrecy. In semiological literary theory, this system is referred to as a metalinguistic system, a language which refers to another grammatical system of codes. In other words, a discourse which conceals another, more significant, but subterranean discourse.

The Taiwanese girl

In this subject's case, the focus will be a written cultural expression, a dictated 'story' that she agreed to create on a subject other children in the multi-cultural group, analyzed above, were reluctant to engage in. The subject is birds, thematically related to the curricular emphasis of the day. The Taiwanese girl's cultural system will be exposed through an analysis of her brief story dictated to the researcher:

> "Once upon a time, there was a Robin. She flew to the village. The people gave her food. He (sic.) took some flowers to the baby. He came to the nest, but the baby was gone. The baby came back. The end." (Oct. 21)

". . .there was a Robin."

Notice two codes in this rhetorical segment. First, the formula "there was" which culturally refers to a narrative code (Barthes, 1985). Western narratives beginning with "there was" refer to inaugurations of narratives. The problem of inauguration is an important one but not new to literary studies; it has been critiqued by ancient and classical rhetoric. The latter, in fact, has laid down extremely specific rules for beginnings of discursive genres. Culturally interpreted in the Western context, these inaugural rules for tales, narratives, and other systems of discourse symbolize a system of protocols through which the narrator discovers what to say and by which the reader or audience interprets that formal narrative is about to be launched.

In the Taiwanese girl's case, the inauguration of her narrative dictation was an extremely perilous zone. It was her emergence from silence; a groping among a complicated collection of cross-cultural narrative codes for the building blocks of her story. Second, when she chose the name "Robin" for her bird, the code of proper names, of

naming things (Levi-Strauss, 1963), in structural theory referred to as the 'onomastic code,' was evidently from the Western collection of cultural signifiers. So far, based on her grasp of narrative form and content, she appears to express the dominant cultural/social system.

"She flew to the village."

But in this phrase the theory of assimilation breaks down. The feminine gender "she" for a bird and the term "village" are conceptual categories and symbols that an American child would find difficulty in coming up with (in their case it would probably translate into "he," and "town" or "city"). The Taiwanese girl is drawing them from a semic system to which she has access, assigning femininity to birds and inscribing "villages" with topographic significance in the cultural system of meanings.

"The people gave her food."

Notice the feminine classification continues as well as the semic system from which she drew signifiers as in the preceding phrase. "The people" is interpreted by the researcher as a cultural code signifying "community" of shared beliefs and symbols. This community is not one in which fearsome events transpire (as in formulas of standard Western tales that require the dramatic tension of villainy); rather, mutual supportiveness has real, social meaning. Thus, "food" is provided to the bird who prefers to come to the community to be nourished rather than hunt out sustenance through personal resource and individual endurance. "Food" is shared and given, not hunted or taken: two separate cultural practices that derive meaning from the separate histories of Asian communities and Western societies. Once more, as we can we discern in the literary deconstruction of this story, there is an expressive rejection of the culture of individuality so prized in the Western, especially U.S., tradition.

"He took some flowers to the baby."

The gender has suddenly reverted to a Western cultural code from an Asian cultural code: the bird is now masculine. On the other hand, the reasons for this reversion may be

specifically Chinese in origin. What is more notable, however, is that the robin does not carry food back to the baby; "he" or "she" takes back "flowers." In the symbolic field of cultural objects and characters, this choice is distinctive. The baby, it seems, has as great a need for beauty as the parent had earlier for sustenance. Beauty transposes sustenance; in fact, it displaces food. The parent, feminine or masculine, has a social expectation for nurturing a regard for the aesthetic. The carrying of the flower to the nest also celebrates the interconnectedness of nature (the flower) to the anthropomorphic world (the birds are symbolic projections of people). Here is a system of cultural narrative codes that is more readily attributable to Asian cultures than to Western or U.S..

"He came to the nest but the baby was gone."

The first instance of dramatic tension emerges. In fact, it stands as the moment of dramatic climax. The masculine gender persists, but there is now a manipulation of Western narrative codes; a sense of plot, or action, in which a climatic moment is inserted to fulfill the formula. The nest is the symbolic center of the social system and the painful absence of the baby subverts the structure. The emergence of plot refers to familiarity with the chronological cultural code in the Western collection that dictates sequences and to the actional cultural code that regulates momentum through verbal expansion: "came," "but," "was."

"Then the baby came back."

Verbal expansion structurates this next phrase with "Then. . .came. . ." But more significantly, the conflict of the two narrative cultural-code collections is quite evident. By calling it the `conflict of the codes' one is sensitized to the stress, the tension the storyteller/narrator is enduring. The Taiwanese child resolves this tension promptly without narrative delay, by favoring the Asian code. A resolution in favor of the Western code collection would have demanded heroic deeds or continued dramatic action. She veers from this narrative path and reverts to the cultural signification structure of communal

order and social harmony: the baby is returned, the social center is restored, the elements of nature are in balance.

Summary of the Head Teacher's 'tales'

The harvesting of discourse from the head teacher during the course of two interviews led to the detection of moral-fable tale structures in the interview transcripts. These were analyzed in an interview summary and the conclusions which follow derive from that analysis.

Miniature narratives the researcher has identified as "moral fables" dominate the verbatim interview transcript. Without the tools of literary analysis, however, the transcript would be merely transparent; a document that "informs" the researcher about some provable 'reality' in the classroom that the head teacher, in her generosity to be helpful, has isolated. But with literary, linguistic, and anthropological structural analysis, it is possible to peel back rhetorical constructions and expose the textual grid by which a dominant social ideology is expressed through fable-like formulas. As with all good fables, the head teacher's stories have didactive purpose, that is to say they possess a moral framework that confers the social system with a hierarchy of cultural values.

The exposed narrative fabric brings into critical view a particular semic system in her moral fables:

(1) Example: "M. has a very strong personality. She just is real clear about what she wants and I think the kids just really like her. . . . With J., she's real popular because J. has all these real fancy dresses that she wears all these "little mermaid" regalia stuff that she brings in, all sorts of big pouffy dresses with lace all around. . . .

In these and other tales sprinkled all through the interview transcripts, children in the classroom are socially constructed into character typologies with specific functions; these include functions that instruct in the meaning of moral conduct, the tension between the values of this particular classroom and those of the external parental world, and normative concepts of leadership and peer relations. Character typologies that are functional, as Propp demonstrated (1968) for the true fable/tale genre, are not psychological subjects but

rhetorical devices to carry the action forward toward a didactic conclusion, or to symbolize ritual structures in the system of meanings.

(2) The purified, coherent ritual center that embodies the ideology of the dominant, sanctioned social organization is constructed by means of linguistic oppositions to an antithetical world: that of parents. The latter become a necessary signifier of villainy without which the dominant ideology of child development, curriculum, social attitudes, and cultural forms could not be defined, much less justified. This duality is a recurrent motif throughout the fables, consistent in each tale. Example:

". . .when they brought D. to school he was screaming and crying and having a terrible time and it was because he'd only been with the mother long enough to go to bed and get up and come to pre-school. . . . That's real hard for him. He has a hard time interacting with the other kids because his parents never leave him here really long enough to build up any kind of relationship with anybody."

Frequent portraits of parents in this light lead the researcher to conclude that narrative pairing of the Classroom/Parents is part of a single, unified cultural code crucial to the maintenance of the internal system.

(3) The 'corrupted' universe of parents that bounds the identity of the classroom is embellished with high intensity signifiers pregnant with symbolism. These signifiers include mermaid dolls, "fancy dresses," (see earlier quote) and other cultural artifacts of the commercial national culture. The objects both serve the actional code to move the plot in a defined sequence, and the symbolic field of ascensional symbolism which governs how particular cultural possessions lead to particular ends and consequences.

(4) Some of the head teacher's narratives are constructions that help the storyteller come to terms with particular social struggles through a fictional containment of meaning. One such social, even cultural, struggle is with the parents of the 'multi-cultural children.' Her tales in this category speak to a moral outrage at the parents' inability to comprehend the "true" nature of child development--that conceptual pattern of sequences that is culturally pervasive in American education. Example:

"Like occasionally we'll have parents from one of the Arab countries that don't want their kids with any other Arabic speakers because they have them at school to learn English. . . . And we have to get into this argument with them about the fact that it's important for them (the children) to have someone that they can depend on that can speak their language to them. . . . But these parent are quite upset about it. They say we're turning this room into a Spanish ghetto or an Arabic ghetto. That's a real emotional thing."

The Arab, Asian, and South American parents bring to the classroom divergent assumptions of childhood that are linked to the social/cultural systems from which they originated, and which now are in clear conflict with the dominant ideology of the classroom. The tales, therefore, are structured to demonstrate a morally unambiguous set of polemics in which the figural world of foreign-born parents and their culturally disapproved categories of thought are contrasted with the rationalistic and biologically derived certainties of childhood that are enshrined in the discourse of this American pre-school classroom.

The children, meanwhile, form the code of that which is signified; in other words, their very beings, their existence, is fabricated from the struggle between signifying concepts. The concepts of childhood, thus, become the characters who do battle in the tale and the children are the material objects gifted to the victor. The head teacher and the parents of the 'multi-cultural children' constitute, in this rhetorical scheme, a topographic code of nations, of kingdoms, fertile with the histories of institutionalized cultural meanings, each backing a single concept--the narrative function of which is character--in the struggle.

Discussion

The preceding analysis of the narrative discourse gathered during fieldwork in this ethnography can now be assessed and summarized in reference to research questions outlined earlier.

I. What sequence of action, i.e. tales, can be identified?: A range of tale structures and forms have been identified and representational examples analyzed. Tales or narratives about the nature and meaning of social reality were gleaned from dictated stories, crafts activities, gestures, interpretations of printed literature, and interview transcripts.

II. Can a grammatology of tales based on formal units be developed?: Elements of a complex grammar of tales in both the children's stories and those of the head teacher clearly emerge from the analysis.

III. What are the tensions between narratives of the children from multi-cultural background and those of the head teacher?: The dialectical system articulated in the narratives shows pervasive oppositional structures. The children's cultural codes are resistant to appropriation by the dominant social organization of the classroom, even in those cases where the child knows, understands, and speaks the dominant language. Each of the activity contexts in which the children's narratives were recorded evidences a set of cultural meanings that could not be fully and successfully mobilized for consensual purposes by the social center. In no case were the children's narratives found to be, separately or collectively, unqualifiedly compliant to the conceptual structures and practices intended to systematically order their world.

IV. How does the social/cultural system emerge from these modes of opposition and consensus?: Discerned through the structures, themes, forms, plots, and signification system of the children's and teacher's tales and fables, the social/cultural system of the classroom is one pervaded with duality and opposition. Viewed hierarchically, there is, first, a particular ideology of what constitutes childhood, child development, cultural pluralism, and ordering relationships between the ideology, the dominant culture and the subordinate cultures of children from non-U.S. backgrounds, that actively mobilizes consent and social structure in the classroom.

On the second level are scattered the experiences of American children who already possess a vocabulary of shared assumptions with the classroom's dominant ideology, but who, as evident in the fables of the head teacher, are in conflict with endorsed beliefs through their possession and manipulation of regressive cultural symbols, commercial narratives from film and television, and narrow, parochial attitudes from the exogenous world of parents. This 'middle world' of the class majority is constructed both in the head

teacher's narratives as well as in the narratives of the subordinate social group--the third tier.

At this third tier, and in significant tension with both the dominant classroom ideology and the cultural code of American children, is the creative force of children with multi-cultural backgrounds, mostly from Asia and South America. Despite their young age, the 'multi-cultural' children have fabricated a very sophisticated, resistant, symbolically rich world in their tales and narrative discourse that reinvents both the dominant ideology and the cultural practices of their peers in terms of their own cultural codes.

V. How can the contribution and usefulness of literary theory to cultural ethnography be evaluated?: The identification of this complex dynamic and the processes by which it is constructed, and in which it functions, could not have emerged from a literal, informational, denotative content analysis of field data. The latter, more orthodox method would lead the researcher to infer a concrete social reality made up only of literal denotations of words, symbols, and gestures, and not the underlying cultural/metaphoric/symbolic connotations.

Therefore, it is the conclusion of the researcher for this study that this particular approach and interdisciplinary framework holds promise for ethnographic work and content analysis of field data in communication studies. It also points the way for additional research to further test this method.

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